

Friends in low places

Toilet trouble brings appreciation of true comradeship



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I was stuck on the toilet the other day.

Don't laugh — it isn't funny. It was in a public restroom. Shudder. But at least I was stuck in my favorite public restroom, if there is such a thing as a favorite public restroom.

Normally, being stuck on the toilet isn't so bad if you're at home with a well-worn "Sports Illustrated," but I was experiencing the major predicament of using a public restroom: There's just one toilet and many people want to use it.

So there I am, stuck on the hopper at the mercy of gravity hoping that a magical fairy would bring me a spoon. As the knocking at the door grew even more intense, it finally hits me; there is indeed a meaning to the painting on the wall.

"A Friend in Need" is its title and for the longest time, I just thought it was some dogs sitting around playing a game of poker. I guess I didn't ever spend enough time on the can, because at this juncture, I realized that one of the dogs was slipping a needed ace to the dog next to him. Wow. What a cool dog, losing that hand (would it be paw?) just so his colleague could win. Perhaps the winning dog would split the profits with his partner in crime. Perhaps he'd take the money and run.

Either way, the display of friendship depicted in that scene really got to me, and it wasn't just because I was gritting my teeth and pushing really hard.

Those dogs really got me thinking about the coolest people in the world — my friends. Not to be smug or anything but I say they're the coolest people in the world because, next to my strand of 41 chromosomes, they play the biggest role in shaping who I am.

However, in my mind's eye, I've been a pretty lame friend. Lately, I've been relying on the "bump into them" method, which means that contact with

many good friends has been reduced to sending them inane e-mail forwards a couple of times a week. What really makes me feel guilty is that many of these people live just across town, not in some far-away land.

When I think of my friends, really goofy thoughts pop into my head. I also think about how a good friend is there not only as a conspirator, but as someone who offers those little intangibles that an average acquaintance couldn't offer, such as throwing a blanket over you when you pass out on their front lawn.

Or stop laughing long enough to drive you to the hospital after you break your collarbone in a futile attempt at getting big air.

Even worse than that, after that same friend who drove you to the hospital, fractures his skull and loses his tooth in a horrible wood chopping accident, all he does is brand the friend who did the damage with the nickname "Ax Master."

And I guess a friend is the kind of person who doesn't punch you in the nose after you hit him in the eye with a snow ball.

Only friends would have the ability to bring you eye-to-eye with death and pestilence, and make you like it; case in point — dragging you out on an epic mountain bike ride that tops out at almost 11,000 feet.

Aside from being good people to maim and abuse, when I think of friends, I think of people who believe a round of kamikazes will brighten up any dull situation.

They also never turn down a trip to The Dubliner.

They also like to corrupt your education, especially when they show up at your door the eve of a big test with a pair of Stars tickets — and the icing on the cake, the promise of free beer.

When it comes to parties, especially birthdays, friends are the kind of people who think setting a completely soused lesbian loose at The Foxy Lady with a fist full of dollars is a mighty fine way to help her celebrate her 21st birthday.

They also know that, whenever possible, no 21st birthday is over until people have run naked through a Waffle House parking lot.

And if they can't make it to your birthday, they'll send you chocolate chip cookies.

Or to cheer you up, they'll go through the trouble of calling your

mother to see what your favorite sweets are.

Speaking of cheer, only a friend could dole out such fine relationship advice such as "Just hope she gets it from a lot of guys. Then she'll know how good you were, yep."

Then, when she does "get it" from someone other yourself, they're always willing to assign that former special someone a derogatory nickname based on their most personal secrets.

When you finally find a new special someone, they're always willing to jump on the proverbial grenade and endure a double date with her annoying friend.

Speaking of special someones, there will always be some areas where they can never replace your friends.

Such as going to wait in line for the first showing of the Star Wars re-release at 7:30 in the morning.

Or picking you up at 5:30 for a KISS show that starts at 8 p.m. — in

Kansas City.

They're also good for such mischievous acts as going to campus at three in the morning to draw chalk body outlines at every emergency phone, complete with fake blood.

Things get a little silly with friends though, especially when you haven't seen each other in a long time. You know it's been a really long time when that reunion results in such wild carousing that you end up at Shakers only to watch your friend get slapped by a waitress for giggling at the naked women.

You also know that it's been too long when you go to the video store and you both dart over to "The Big Lebowski" and ask, "Seen this yet?" Even family can't stand in for

friends. When you only have two tickets to the Beastie Boys and your guest has to be either a cousin or a friend, naturally, you pick your friend.

When family is involved, though, friends know that in order to make advance towards a buddy's sister, one must offer something of equal value up in trade, such as their attractive mother.

Friends also don't hold grudges. Eighteen years after you shoved her in the grossest funk pond imaginable, as a way of showing your affection, only a friend would still admit to being your kindergarten love.

And most importantly, a true friend would let you do your business in peace.

For crying out loud, doesn't that jackass know I'll be done in a minute?



MATT HANEY/DN

I'm floored

Housing should figure out students' real 'special interests'



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If you walk into UNL's residence halls, you can find plenty of special-interest floors.

Floors for people who only want 12-hour visitation. Floors for engineering students. Floors for students interested in journalism. Floors for students who want to do community service. And floors for students that desire a "healthy lifestyle."

That's right, more floors than you can probably count on both hands

(even while drunk).

But why stop? Let's create floors for students who collect movie stubs! Floors for students who never got the really expensive toys as kids! Heck, let's create the first floor in history for students that are avid Pro Wrestling fans.

After all, what could bring a floor together more than watching Disco Inferno and Raven hit each other over the head with card tables?

One can never have too many special-interest floors, right?

Wrong.

I won't hesitate in saying that the housing department has gone too far with the number and variety of floors it forced on students last year.

I use the phrase "forced on" because students had no chance to voice input on the floors that would be created, if any at all.

And when students are given no voice as to what they are interested in, you've got a mess that looks something like the leftovers from an Eskimo seal hunt.

Take my dorm, for example — Pound Hall.

Once upon a time Pound had a handful of special-interest floors, most notably smoke-free floors.

Now half of the 12 floors are special interest. We have two business floors, two healthy-lifestyle floors, and two community-service floors.

Throw in smoke-free floors and only two floors, Pound 10 and 11, are free from being designated as something special-interest. That means if you're a guy or girl smoker, you have only one floor to live on.

About a dozen guys and myself (some of whom are smokers) had to move four stories up just to get away from these floors. Needless to say we weren't too keen on what was soon-to-become the "healthy-lifestyle" floor (unless nutritionists reconsider the nourishing value of Pizza Hut).

And my hall isn't the only one. Plenty of halls became guinea pigs to new and exciting special-interest floors...

... Plenty of which have already

fallen on their faces.

Once again, I'll mention Pound Hall. The two community-service floors in my dorm have done no community-service projects. The healthy-lifestyle floors have done no special activities based on their special-interest floor status. And the business floors were supposed to run the Pub. But you guessed it — that never happened.

Even Housing admits it made a mistake.

Director of Housing Doug Zatechka said at the Jan. 24 Residence Hall Association meeting that he thought there were "too many floors" and suspected that they might be "scaled back."

Well, I have a challenge for Zatechka and anyone else in Housing involved with the decision to create, destroy or maintain special-interest floors:

Talk to the students you're actually trying to help.

I think it's really a decent concept to create special-interest floors. It's

admirable, even. But to not even ask the students currently living on the floors what they think about them makes my blood boil hotter than 30 gallons of Taco Bell "Fire" sauce.

However, the administration is not all to blame. We students let the issue get swept under the rug right in front of our faces last year.

But not this year.

This year, if you're a student, take an interest and make the administration listen. Set up a forum on this, write a few e-mails to your hall officers or contact RHA's Residential Enhancement Committee.

Why?

Because not all of us enjoy being a part of a "community" we didn't even create. Or being short-changed by floors that aren't even doing what they were supposed to do.

Some of our "special interests" go far beyond what those not even living in the halls decided they would be.

And it's time for both sides to understand that.